

# PRESS RELEASE

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**7 May 2008**

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## **Volunteer scoops learning award**

Shelley Whitney (46), who regained her confidence and built her self-esteem as a volunteer at the Wedgwood Museum Trust in Stoke-on-Trent, has been named as the winner of MLA West Midlands Special Individual Adult Learners' Week Award.

Volunteering has helped Shelley cope with depression and to rebuild her life after undergoing gender reassignment. She has undertaken a range of tasks at the museum, beginning with documentation and object cleaning and handling. As her skills and confidence have grown, she has taken on more challenging roles, including project managing the viewing of the museum's collection of archive film and helping to run a family-learning event last summer. Volunteering has opened up for her the possibility of a new career in museums and a new belief in her own abilities.

'My learning here has changed my life in that it has brought me to something that not only I love doing, but which I'm good at, and at which I will earn my living.'

The MLA West Midlands Award is being presented for the first time this year. It recognises the outstanding achievements of adult learners, as well as the contribution that museums, libraries and archives make to supporting them. The panel of judges unanimously agreed that Shelley is a worthy winner of the Individual Award.

**MLA West Midlands: the regional council for museums, libraries and archives**

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Shelley believes that the support and encouragement that she has received at Wedgwood has been instrumental in helping her turn her life around. As Shelley has said of her experience as a volunteer 'Everything I've learned here, all my experiences and everything I've done has helped me to realise that I am not a guest in my own life, but that I can and will make it what I want it to be. THAT is what learning means to me.'

**Ends**

## Notes to Editors

### MLA West Midlands

MLA West Midlands works with the eight English regional agencies and the Museums Libraries and Archives Council in the MLA Partnership to improve people's lives by building knowledge, supporting learning, inspiring creativity and celebrating identity. The Partnership acts collectively for the benefit of the sector and the public, leading the transformation of museums, libraries and archives for the future. Visit: [www.mlawestmidlands.org.uk](http://www.mlawestmidlands.org.uk).

### NIACE and Adult Learners' Week

1. Shelley Whitney will be presented with the MLA West Midlands Special Individual Adult Learners' Week Award at the West Midlands Adult Learners' Week Regional Award Ceremony at Kings Hall, Stoke on Trent on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2008 from 10:30am – 12:30pm. Journalists and photographers are invited to attend. More information is available from Ed Melia, NIACE Press Officer, on 0116 204 4248 or 07795 358 870 or [ed.melia@niace.org.uk](mailto:ed.melia@niace.org.uk)
2. Adult Learners' Week, 17<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup> May 2008, is the largest annual celebration of adult learning in the UK. It is supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the European Social Fund, learndirect, the National Learning and Skills Council, Ofcom - the Office of Communications, the Quality Improvement Agency, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and City and Guilds. More details at: [www.alw.org.uk](http://www.alw.org.uk)
3. Adult Learners' Week 2008 will include the following national events:
  - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May: **Cultural Diversity Weekend**
  - Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May: **Adult Learners' Week National Award Ceremony** - QEII Conference Centre, London
  - Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> May: **National Policy Conference** *Adult Learning and Culture* to be held at the London Chamber of Commerce
  - Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> May: Quick Reads Learners' Favourite Award and Voice on a Page to be held at The Globe Theatre
  - Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May: **Learning at Work Day** – *What makes learning at work, work* at the Victory Services Club, Marble Arch
  - Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May: **Silver Surfers Day**
4. A national helpline - **learndirect** - is available year-round for confidential advice and information about careers and courses. The call handlers will have access to the NIACE website and can give information about local activities during Adult Learners' Week. Calls are free on 0800 100 900.
5. Events for Adult Learners' Week 2008 are listed in the interactive online calendar at [www.alw.org.uk/calendar](http://www.alw.org.uk/calendar) where you can search by keyword, your preferred date and by the region you live in. Or call **learndirect** free on 0800 100 900 to find Adult Learners' Week events local to you.
6. The themes for Adult Learners' Week 2008 are:
  1. Globalisation and the changing world of work
  2. Environmental Sustainability
  3. Technological Change

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4. Citizenship and belonging in a diverse society
  5. Demographic change
  6. Poverty reduction
  7. Changing expectations and perceptions of the Third Sector
  8. Well-being and happiness
7. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is the leading non-government organisation for lifelong learning in England, and exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in better-quality learning of all kinds. It campaigns for, and celebrates the achievements of, all adult learners.

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**To contact the winners or institutions involved**

**The Wedgwood Museum Trust**

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